FUTURE PICKS!! WHAT'S UP AND COMING IN COMICS!

VANTAGE
COMIC & CARD PICKS

Inside information for comic dealers and collectors!

USA $2.95 / Canada $4.25 #17, January 1996

THE SMALL PRESS WHIZ KIDS AT ETERNAL PUBLISHING

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We reserve the right to change info or picks if new information comes in before we print **Vantage**. For changes other than small corrections and minor adjustments, we will keep you updated.

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signed

BY NENE THOMAS

limited

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ARE WE CRAZY???

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MAGIC: THE GATHERING CARDS

This is the rarest item ever offered through the **Vantage** signature series! Artist proofs are high-end representations of **Magic: The Gathering** cards, produced by Wizards of the Coast and given in small quantities to the artists who draw the cards. Artist proof cards have white backs and are not normally for sale. Only a handful of proofs exist for each single card! **Vantage** has acquired a small quantity of artist proofs for **Magic: The Gathering Ice Age** cards. Your artist proof will come from Nene Thomas' personal collection, signed by her, and accompanied by a certificate of authenticity. These proofs will be from *rare and uncommon cards only!* Since you may have never seen an artist proof before, we'll make this guarantee: If you're not happy with your proof, you may return it for a full refund within ten days!

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VANTAGE™
COMIC & CARD PICKS
number Seventeen

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Special thanks to our advisors!

Vantage Comic & Card Picks
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TOP PICKS OF THE MONTH

Archangels: The Saga #1-up (Eternal / Great art, great story, great coloring, small print run)

The Crow: Dead Time #1 (Kitchen Sink Press / All Crow comics guide at big $, distributor wars should limit availability)

MORE VANTAGE PICKS

Baywatch — The Magazine #1-up (Acclaim Comics / Photo-comic based on most watched show in the world)

Fantastic Four #25-26 (Marvel / Silver age battle between Hulk and Thing)

Futuretech #1 / Swarm #1 (Mushroom Comics / Great computer coloring, nice art, small press)

Generation X, all (Marvel / Live-action TV movie coming)

GI Joe #1-up (Dark Horse / TV show coming, back in style thanks to the Gulf War)

GI Joe, A Real American Hero #1, 60 (Marvel / First Marvel issue & a McFarlane issue respectively)

GI Joe #1-51 (Ziff-Davis / Earliest series, printed in '50s, Korean War)

Jon Sable Freelance #11 (First Comics / First Maggie The Cat)

Nira X/Cynder: Endangered Species #1 (Entity / Two female heroes)

Superman #199 (DC/ Silver age, Flash and Superman's first race)

WATCH FOR THE VANTAGE STAR INDICATING OUR TOP PICKS!

Vantage is opposed to speculation, which we define as the purchase of comics by a fan solely for the purpose of selling quickly to others. The difficulty in speculating is that the comic market fluctuates quickly and dealers will not pay full market value for your books even when they do go up (they have to resell them). Vantage is intended for use by 1) Retailers 2) Show dealers 3) Fans who buy comics mainly for reading, but who also have an interest in the marketplace. - Publisher Rob Golub

SOME BIG CHANGES IN STORE

Once again, the cost of paper has gone up. Again, orders have fallen industry-wide. I'm happy to report that while most publishers have seen substantial drops in sales, **Vantage** sales have dipped only slightly. Our market share has actually *increased*.

Still, we are a small company and we can feel the squeeze just like everyone else. The fact that we report on industry conditions does not, unfortunately, serve to somehow magically insulate us.

We have decided to cut back and look for ways to increase revenue. For one thing, we're launching two new magazines, **Starship Online** in January and **Comics Focus** in March. You'll also see a few other surprises from **Vantage** in the near future.

We're also changing **Vantage Comic & Card Picks.** Look for subscriptions to become more expensive (if you've been putting off sending in that subscription coupon, now's the time). **Vantage Comic & Card Picks** will experience a slight cover price increase and some format changes.

The goal here is to turn this company into a mean, lean fighting machine, so that we can aggressively compete in a dog-eat-dog marketplace. The result for you, our valued customer, may be a little more cost, and a little less glitz, and I'm sorry for that. But we're not going to sacrifice the quality of our reporting or analysis. Expect all of the same great things from **Vantage** that you've come to know. In 1996, look to **Vantage** for some of the most exciting changes and ideas in the weird world of comics!

—Rob Golub

U.C.C. FIGHTS FOR THE LITTLE GUY

By Brian Petersen

U.C.C. stands for the United Coalition of Creators. It has been said that there is strength in numbers, and the U.C.C. has been formed to exploit this for smaller, and newer publishers.

According to Stephen Egged, one of the founders of the organization, the U.C.C. actually started out as the M.C.C. (Michigan Coalition of Creators). It was changed to the U.C.C. after many people at conventions commented on how good of an idea it was and when interest came from publishers outside of Michigan. As for the original idea for the U.C.C., it came about while Egged was searching for a cheaper way to advertise books. Basically, all of the member publishers will share the cost of advertising, thus cutting down on any one publisher having to foot a large bill. According to Egged, The U.C.C. acts as a forum for the members to publish in and share advertising costs.

So far, five companies have been locked in as members of the U.C.C. and Egged says five more are lined up for the future. He also stated that many of the people who make up these publishers have worked for other comic book companies, such as Marvel, DC, and Lightning, so they are not new to the publishing business. Member companies must be really dedicated to publishing their comics and, by being members of the U.C.C., they show that they plan to follow through with it. All of the books are solicited under the U.C.C. banner and can be found in the major catalogs. "Diamond and Capital liked the idea," Egged says, "as we act as a sort of pre-screen for these publishers." The companies themselves all do their own books, while Egged acts as a sort of chief administrator, taking care of the behind the scenes work relating to advertising, administrative duties, etc. It works well, as none of the companies have to worry about paying a staff to do this work, Egged says.

The U.C.C. offers many benefits for publishers who join and become members, among them: convenience, printing, advertising, representation at comic conventions, and a large resource of talent for publishers looking for artists, writers, inkers, etc.

All books published by members of the U.C.C. will be featured in the catalogs, such as **Previews**, under U, for United Coalition of Creators. This provides the customer with one place to look for U.C.C. titles vs. having to look all through the catalog. The idea is to share that space with other small publishers and reap the benefits that come from it, thus making it convenient for all members.

Another benefit of U.C.C. membership is in the area of printing. Any U.C.C. members printing books can receive a discount from the printer because the printing is coordinated through the U.C.C. The books are all printed at the same time, with three or more titles between publishers, thus entitling them to a volume discount.

As for advertising, the U.C.C. has also set up a program whereby members can advertise in other U.C.C. books in a kind of advertisement trading program. The U.C.C. promises to make the inter-membership fair for all members, and work on a one ad for one ad system. This helps to promote members books as well as cut down on often expensive advertising costs that can really drain smaller publishers. The resulting exposure should be beneficial for all U.C.C. members, as well as the U.C.C. itself.

For publishers that wish to attend a comic book convention, but are unable to due to financial restrictions, etc., the U.C.C. has in the works a method where members will still be represented even though they are unable to attend. Members attending conventions will help promote not only themselves, but members who are not present, as well.

Last, but not least, the U.C.C., through member companies, will have a large source of talent available for members who are in need of a penciler, a writer, an inker, or any other talent needed in the publishing of a comic book. The U.C.C. is open to any other ideas that members wish to contribute and are looking for input. They cannot, however, help publishers and aspiring publishers with financing. It is up to the member companies to secure capital for their books.

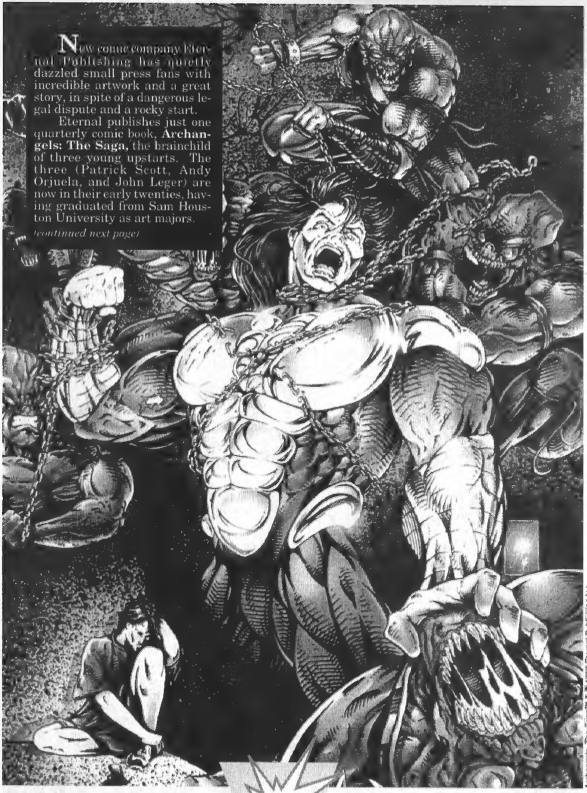
As for the forecast of the U.C.C.s success and the market itself, Egged says, "I'm not worried, because there has been so much interest and lots of people have been saying what a great idea it is," and "Why didn't anyone think of it sooner?" Egged sees the U.C.C. concept as a growth area and feels good about the future.

For any information or to apply for membership, the U.C.C. can be contacted at: U.C.C., P.O. Box 1681, Southgate, MI 48195. They ask that you please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a quick response. The first group of U.C.C. titles are due out in December. Watch for them in the catalogs.

New comic company Eternal Publishing has quietly dazzled small press fans with incredible artwork and a great story, in spite of a dangerous legal dispute and a rocky start.

Eternal publishes just one quarterly comic book, **Archangels: The Saga,** the brainchild of three young upstarts. The three (Patrick Scott, Andy Orjuela, and John Leger) are now in their early twenties, having graduated from Sam Houston University as art majors.

(continued next page)



Archangels: The Saga™ & © 1996 Eternal Publishing Inc.

NEW PUBLISHER, INCREDIBLE ART!

ETERNAL COMICS BLOWS FANS AWAY!

(OFF PANEL)

(continued from previous page)

With absolutely no experience in comic book publishing, Eternal's first issue of **Archangels: The Saga** hit sales of 12,500 through comic shops. In today's market this is a reasonably strong start. Eternal's commitment to launching a top quality book deserves the credit. "We did our homework," said Andy Orjuela.

A total of 25,000 copies of the first issue have been printed. For the second issue, 18,000 have been printed though only 9,000 were ordered by comic shops. Where are all of the extra books going? Why print 25,000 when you only sell 12,500 through comic shops? The answer is that Eternal has discovered there are other ways to sell comics besides North America's few thousand comic shops. Eternal is mining a relatively untapped market for comic book sales — the Christian market. Though Eternal insists that their books do not endorse any religion, their commitment to a kinder and gentler comic book has impressed many Christian stores and distributors.

Previews for January lists Eternal Publishing in a small paragraph without accompanying art. Due to a computer glitch, Eternal was not able to get their cover art for #3 to **Previews** by deadline (it graces the cover to this issue of **Vantage**). The missing art should help to keep numbers low for the time being. Based on the high quality of the art, the computer coloring, and the story, **Vantage** expects the ball to start rolling for this publisher shortly. **Archangels: The Saga** may become bi-monthly (perhaps after #3) and upon its conclusion look for a possible follow-up mini called **Archangels: The Cult.** A third book is also under consideration for March.

THE UNDERWORLD
A FORBIDDING PLACE WHERE EVIL AND LIES ARE INTERTWINED ALL SPOTTINGHAWK-LIKE
TO ALL BUT ONE
YOU ARE CERTAIN YUEHNOR?
YES OVERLORD BALEKA, I AM CERTAIN. THE SOUL WORTH THESE LOST RUNES CRIMSON KEY
EXCELLENT! THESE RUNES BELONG TO ME
EACH NEW SOUL DELIVERED INTO MY GRASP WILL SEND A MESSAGE TO OUR FIRST FATHERS WRATH AND DYING KINGDOM.
BEFORE LONG, WE SHALL REGAIN OUR RIGHTFUL PLACE IN THE HEAVENS, AND HIS SON'S SACRIFICE FOR THE WORLD SHALL BE IN VEIN!
UH...LORD BALEKA, THERE WAS NO SOUL TO REAP. THE BOY WAS SPOKEN FOR.
YOU GAVE THE BOY UP TO THE LIGHT WILLINGLY?
N...NO MY LORD! I...I STRUGGLED FIERCELY WITH ONE OF THEIR SOLDIERS, BUT WAS FORCED TO RETREAT
YET I ASSURE YOU SIRE, YOUR WILL HAS BEEN DONE
Archangels: The Saga™ & © 1996 Eternal Publishing Inc.

Violence Is Off-Panel

Eternal is different from most other publishers in that it was not founded simply to make money or to get artistic exposure — the company seeks to promote "positive values." Patrick Scott writes stories that avoid violence for the sake of violence, "We want to show action without someone's head being lopped off."

But don't let the talk fool you. Scott and his colleagues are quick to point out that their books are not completely non-violent. "We will obviously depict violent fight scenes," said artist Andy Orjuela, "There has to be some sort of conflict. There will be confrontations. It's not just people talking." The key, says Orjuela, is that Eternal seeks to avoid gratuitous violence. If it is a natural part of the story for a head to be "lopped off" then it may indeed happen in an Eternal comic, but it's not going to be thrown in just to grab attention or sell books.

The story in Archangels is one of good versus evil, where angels fight to protect a young boy from attempting suicide. Rather scary looking demons fight for the boy to succumb to his suicidal tendencies. This plot-line attempts to reflect the power of choice in life.

The story has religious overtones in that it deals with a war between angels and demons, but it is not intended to promote or endorse any religion in particular. "We don't want to preach to anyone," says Scott, "it just has good moral values."

However, thanks to the stand the company has taken against violence and thanks to the use of religious icons like angels in **Archangels: The Saga,** the company does report that the book has been selling briskly through Christian specialty outlets.

Eternal Goes To Court

Vantage had been trying to contact Eternal for months, calling the phone number that information had given us repeatedly. At first we spoke with someone who told us that a legal dispute was pending and that we should call back later. However, when we did call back, we would only get an answering service, and eventually no one would even pick up the phone.

It was only recently that **Vantage** was told that we have not been calling Eternal — according to Leger, *we were calling someone claiming to be Eternal!* "We eventually took him to court," said Leger, "and we got a restraining order against him."

The ordeal began in a restaurant where writer Patrick Scott had some Archangels drawings on the table in front of him — this was long before Eternal's first comic, **Archangels: The Saga #1**, had been drawn. A gentleman walking by inquired about the artwork, learned about Scott's plans to form a comic company, and offered to help arrange financing. The man also claimed that he had dreamt in his sleep of character designs that seemed similar to Archangels.

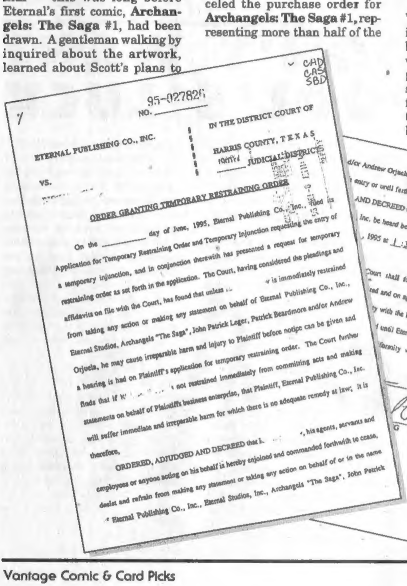
The man impressed the Eternal guys with his knowledge of marketing and after several meetings he almost convinced them to sign a contract granting him 51% ownership in Eternal. When Scott, Orjuela, and Leger refused his offers they had thought the issue was behind them.

Imagine their shock when they received a letter from the man on Eternal letterhead, *claiming that he was Eternal Studios!* To make matters worse, Leger says that Diamond Comics Distributors started to become concerned with two different groups claiming to be Eternal Studios. Diamond canceled the purchase order for **Archangels: The Saga #1**, representing more than half of the sales to all comic book stores. "We had to go through a lot of stuff to reinstate our purchase order for #1," Leger recalled, "It was canceled for about a month or so."

The three college buddies say they took the situation to court and got a restraining order preventing their nemesis from representing himself as Eternal Studios. The three insist that they never signed anything and that the outsider was never involved in the creative process. Eternal now operates as Eternal Publishing, not Eternal Studios.

Feeling very proud of ourselves, Vantage noticed that the theme of good versus evil in Archangels seems to run parallel with the real-life experiences of the Eternal guys. When we asked about this, it became clear that the guys had already thought about it.

"We felt it was very ironic. We felt like we were being kept in some way from releasing the book," said Leger. "I think he was out to exploit this," explained Orjuela, who stopped short of criticizing the man any further. "He let the actual potential of this book get to his head."



CAD
CAS
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NO. 95-027826

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF

ETERNAL PUBLISHING CO., INC.

HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

VS.

JUDICIAL DISTRICT

ORDER GRANTING TEMPORARY RESTRAINING ORDER

On the _____ day of June, 1995, Eternal Publishing Co., Inc. filed its Application for Temporary Restraining Order and Temporary Injunction requesting the entry of a temporary injunction, and in conjunction therewith has presented a request for temporary restraining order to set forth in the application. The Court, having considered the pleadings and affidavits on file with the Court, has found that unless ... ...r is immediately restrained from taking any action or making any statement on behalf of Eternal Publishing Co., Inc., Eternal Studios, Archangels "The Saga", John Patrick Leger, Patrick Beardmore and/or Andrew Orjuela, he may cause irreparable harm and injury to Plaintiff before notice can be given and a hearing is had on Plaintiff's application for temporary restraining order. The Court further finds that if ... ...t not restrained immediately from committing acts and making statements on behalf of Plaintiffs business enterprise, that Plaintiff, Eternal Publishing Co., Inc. will suffer immediate and irreparable harm for which there is no adequate remedy at law; It is therefore,

ORDERED, ADJUDGED AND DECREED that J... ..., his agents, servants and employees or anyone acting on his behalf is hereby enjoined and commanded forthwith to cease, desist and refrain from making any statement or taking any action on behalf of or in the name of Eternal Publishing Co., Inc., Eternal Studios, Inc., Archangels "The Saga", John Patrick

...der Andrew Orjuela from the date of the entry of this order until ...entry or until further order of this Court; It is further,

AND DECREED that the application for temporary injunction ... Inc. be heard before me, Judge of the above-named court ..., 1995 at ... in the civil court building, 301 ...Court shall forthwith upon the filing by Eternal ...ond and on approving the same, according to law ...y with the law and the terms of this order. ...until Eternal Publishing Co., Inc. executes ...diously with the law in the amount of ...

...1995.

eternal: who does that great art?

Archangels: The Saga™ & © 1996 Eternal Publishing Inc.

Andy Orjuela, who does most of the penciling and some of the inking on **Archangels: The Saga,** has never previously published a comic book. His only prior published comic work is a handful of pin-ups for other small press publishers. There's no doubt that this guy is talented. For a change of pace, Eternal allowed DC and Image artist Matt Haley to do the cover to **Archangel: The Saga** #3 (our front cover for this issue as well). Haley's no slouch either, eh?

Eternal prints on an unusual paper stock (and they welcome your comments on it) and the phenomenal computer coloring is also often by Orjuela. This is a nice twist on the growing trend of using computer coloring to dress up mediocre art — instead, Eternal uses computer coloring to enhance great art. What a concept. **Vantage** knows a company or two that could learn something from these guys.

YOU DON'T WANT CLAYPOOL'S LUCK

Elvira™ & © 1996 Queen 'B' Productions

Really, you don't want to have the kind of bad luck that Claypool Comics has had. According to Richard Howell, Editor of Claypool Comics, the past five months have been near-disastrous for Claypool.

In a letter sent to **Vantage** and other comics news magazines, Howell wrote, "For three of the past five months, Diamond Comics has not listed our month's offerings in their catalogue. This past month, Capital did the same. In each case, the people at the distributor end admitted it was their fault, pledged a "make-good" arrangement (to compensate us for the loss of orders from retailers), and listed our books on their update mailings. Diamond even went so far as to track down the employee who was blowing off any responsibilities he didn't want to handle, and suspended him."

With the loss of several distributors and the slow market that is affecting all publishers, the above mentioned omissions from Diamond and Capital's catalogs, and even an omission from Westfield's catalogue, **Vantage** has decided that we are glad we don't have Claypool's luck. (We asked them, are you sure you're remembering to send your monthly information into these places? Our contact at Claypool answered with a sad, exhausted 'yes').

Claypool has reluctantly decided to begin a subscription program, though they promise to keep sales through comic shops as their main emphasis. Claypool publishes horror and humor comics, including Peter David's monthly **Soulsearchers and Company.**

Logo™ & © 1996 Claypool Comics

FIRST NEW CROW SINCE ORIGINAL 1980s MINISERIES

DISTRIBUTION WANTS TO KEEP PRINT RUN LOW! NEW MOVIE OUT SOON!

Speculators who frequent comic shops that order from Capital City Distribution could almost look at this as a gift. The Crow now returns to comics, previous issues having done phenomenally in the back-issue market, and it's only available from Capital City Distribution.

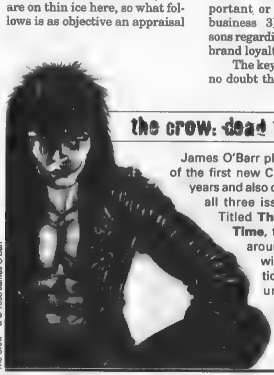
There have only been four original Crow comic books ever made. Ever. They guide for $60-$120. Now, for the first time since that original four-issue 1980's miniseries, three new original miniseries are due out over the next several months. The gasoline on this fire is the fact that the second Crow movie is now in production. **The Crow: City of Angels** will be the second Crow film from Pressman films. Finally, the nitroglycerin on this gassed-up fire is that you can only get the three new Crow minis from Capital City Distribution.

Since **Vantage** depends on both Capital and Diamond for distribution to retailers, we must admit that we feel as though we are on thin ice here, so what follows is as objective an appraisal of the situation as we can come up with.

Capital and Diamond are the two major comics distributors, which means they earn their living by trucking comics to shops. It doesn't sound like much, but distribution factors can hurt or help a publisher's business even moreso than art and story. Several months ago, Capital and Diamond started signing exclusive deals with publishers. Diamond captured most of the major publishers.

Since the only place to get majors like DC and Image is from Diamond, every comic store must now order from Diamond. In fact, retailers can order just from Diamond and get most of what they need. Still, some retailers have decided to *also* order comics from Capital because 1) Some of these retailers see a benefit in encouraging competition between distributors 2) Capital has signed some exclusives with small press, manga, and gaming companies that some retailers feel are important or necessary to their business 3) Various other reasons regarding product selection, brand loyalty, and so forth.

The key here is that there is no doubt that at least some retailers are ordering from Capital, and there is also no doubt that at least some retailers are not ordering from Capital. Exactly how the numbers fall is a debate we're not going to touch, but the moral of our story is that some comic shops won't have the new Crow miniseries even though they might have ordered it if they were ordering from Capital. Demand should come in strong, and once fans realize that the new minis are out there, that they missed them at their local comic shop, and that the movie is coming, the feeding frenzy could be intense. This one's an easy top pick of the month.



the crow: dead time

James O'Barr plots the first issue of the first new Crow miniseries in years and also does the covers for all three issues of the mini. Titled **The Crow: Dead Time**, the series centers around a crow that is witness to an injustice that cannot go unpunished. The story is set in Kansas in the late 1860s.

The Crow™ & © 1996 James O'Barr

Spider-Man™ & © 1996 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.
Superboy™ & © 1996 DC Comics

BIG PRESS COVERAGE FOR MARVEL VERSUS DC

The upcoming **Marvel Versus DC/DC Versus Marvel** mini-series is well on its way to big coverage in the national press. With Colin Powel out of the Presidential race, prospects are looking even better for a sleepy Winter for the national media, which means more air time for the world of comics. The coverage so far has been promising . . .

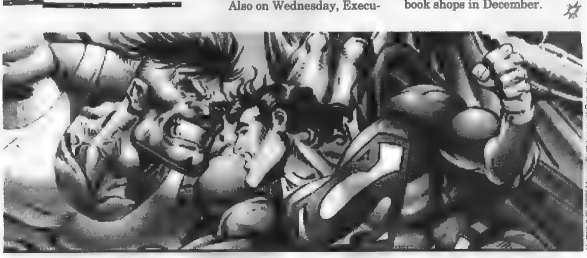
On Wednesday, November 8, at Golden Apple Comics in L.A., a "Rock the Vote" registry was held where fans were able to register to vote and, at the same time, cast their ballots for how they wanted the outcome of the battle between their favorite superheroes to occur. On hand to cast their ballots at this event were a couple of celebrities, Angela Watson (ABC's **Step by Step**) and Colin Grey (from the syndicated **The Hardy Boys**). Then, later that night on **The Tonight Show**, viewers got a surprise as Batman (and the Batmobile) made an appearance to silence a disrupting heckler.

expectation seems to be building over this upcoming event

Also on Wednesday, Executive Editor of the DC Universe Mike Carlin and Executive Editor of the Marvel Universe Mark Gruenwald entered the airwaves in a telephone press conference and satellite "tour" of 16 major radio markets. The two broadcast in the morning from 6:00 a.m. until 10:00 a.m. Eastern Time discussing the event. Helping the two in their effort to draw attention to the crossover was a piece in that morning's **USA Today** as well.

Not only was mention made of the crossover in **USA Today**, but also in the **New York Times "Style"** section on November 5. In addition, smaller papers around the country have been running shorts focusing on the event, among them the Buffalo, NY **News**, the Connecticut **Post**, and several others.

Expectation seems to be building over this upcoming event, and with all of the press coverage being afforded to it, the results should be interesting when it debuts. **DC Versus Marvel** #1 is due to hit comic book shops in December.



Hulk™ & © 1996 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.
Superman™ & © 1996 DC Comics

ORDERS SLIP AGAIN

Vantage hears publishers nervously grumbling as some are reporting that their purchase orders for comics due out this Winter are hitting new lows. Just when many thought the industry had gone as low as it could, **Vantage** sources indicate that some publishers have seen orders from retailers, through distributors, drop by as much as 20% in recent months.

To make matters worse, many retailers are still reporting that they are selling out of only 60% to 70% of some big titles. Retailers need to sell more than that to turn a reasonable profit, which means they could be dropping orders for some "established" books even further. Some retailers report that while some publishers' sales may be dropping, retail sales are not. Retailers say that they sell more of a variety of items now. "I sell a lot of little stuff," remarked one store owner.

more medium press failures may be on the horizon

Many of our sources place at least some of the blame for lower publishers' sales on the industry's move to publisher/distributor exclusivity. It may also be that insiders in the comics industry were so swept up with the distributor wars of the past year that marketing and editorial had been forgotten — and today's numbers are the results.

The potential consequences are foreboding. Possibilities include:

1) The distributor wars could flare up once again — sure, all of the major publishers have announced exclusives. *However, Vantage hears that even corapanies that have announced exclusives may not have signed their final contracts yet, and that some may have retained the short-term right to leave their exclusive relationships.*

2) Rumors have been floating around insiders for months that Marvel will some day cease publishing. Instead, they would give some other company the exclusive right to publish Marvel Comics for them.

3) More medium press failures may be on the horizon. Small press publishers can keep costs low, get second jobs, or move the company into the living room. Meanwhile, major publishers like Marvel and DC can just cut back on titles and rely on income from other areas (movies, toys, etc.) or on the unlimited supply of cash available from their parent companies. The real squeeze, however, is on the medium-sized publishers. Medium-sized publishers can't move into the living room, nobody's interested in making their unknown characters into toys, and cutting back often means laying off a valued employee who is already doing a job that would be divided up between three people at Marvel.

how do dealers know what's
hot before i do?
VANTAGE
COMIC & CARD PICKS
THE MAGAZINE FOR COMIC DEALERS AND SERIOUS COLLECTORS!

Wieringo Disappointed

Having left Flash to work on **Robin**, superstar Mike Wieringo is a little disappointed. "The first four issues I did weren't all that much fun," said the artist. He said that the project is not as exciting as he thought it would be and that after his one year contract ended he might look for work elsewhere. Another **X-Men** miniseries would be a possibility, he said.

In the meantime, Weiringo continues to do pinups for small publishers, including a recent pinup for Quesada and Palmiotti's **Ash**.

Robin™ & © 1996 DC Comics

Publishers Have No Work

Comics publishers in general continue to have little to no work for even top artists and writers. Dark Horse's **X** is being canceled with #25 and penciler Javier Salteres doesn't have work lined up yet. He reports that editors have all positions filled and are still cutting back titles at most companies. Although Saltares has confidence he will find the sort of work he wants eventually, he says that in today's market, "It's all timing." Timing indeed — that a top artist like Saltares can't find work with a mere phone call is a sign of these times.

Styx Changes Focus, Cancels Catalog

Styx International, traditionally one of Canada's major comic book distributors, has decided to change the focus of its business. The company has ceased publication of its Up 'n Coming catalog, and it will no longer focus on distribution of comics to retailers, **Vantage** has learned.

Instead, the company intends to earn its profits from the operation of Styx-owned retail comic shops and Styx's own Comics America consumer subscription service. Styx repots that they have recently seen a lift in new Comics America subscribers.

Evil Ernie #3 Features Major Lady Death Story

In **Evil Ernie** #3, Lady Death attempts to return to Earth. She's not allowed on Earth and, we hear, "something huge will happen." In other Chaos! news, look for a certain Catwoman artist to move over to Chaos! for the four issue **Purgatory: The Vampire's Myth** miniseries due out this Spring.

Lady Death™ & © 1996 Brian Pulido

Collectable CDs?

Stan Pedro is a comics retailer who thinks he's on to something. We'll let you decide where this fascinating new idea will go.

The concept is a comic book that comes with a music CD. You listen to the story on CD (no, not CD-ROM, just a regular music CD) while flipping through the comic. Unlike those old comics-with-records of yesteryear, this comic book can't be understood independently. Since there are no word balloons in the comic, you need to listen to the CD to get the story, and the sound effects are pretty neat.

Skeema is Pedro's first attempt. The CD and comic (which is actually the little booklet that you find in most CDs — this is not your standard 32 page comic) retail for around thirteen bucks together.

The Fruits Of Exclusivity

All of them . . . yes, every single comics retailer uses Diamond's **Previews** to choose most of the comics they want to buy for their stores. This makes **Previews** into an even more important battleground for publishers than ever before.

Publishers who have entered into an exclusive arrangement with Diamond are now responsible for designing their own sections in **Previews**. That's why each section now has a different look.

The publishers are: DC, Image, Acclaim, Dark Horse, Crusade, Gemstone, London Night Studios, Maximum Press, and Wizard Press. Some sections are better designed than others. We think DC has the right idea, and other publishers who stray too far from the overall design of **Previews** may be making a mistake. Some of those sections look like ads and might be missed by confused consumers. Diamond intends to redesign the the rest of the **Previews** catalog shortly.

Nira X and Cynder Team Up

Entity Comics' superheroine sensation **Nira X** will team up with Imortelle studios' Cynder character for a one-shot color cross-over comic book entitled **Nira X/Cynder: Endangered Species #1**, shipping **February 1996**. (Please note: Rumors that Entity is the regular publisher of Cynder are incorrect — Imortelle is the publisher of Cynder.)

A $12.95 commemorative edition comes with a variant cover by Matthew Martin, the rising star who was spotlighted in the **Vantage** #00.

Mike Grell's Maggie The Cat

Mike Grell's **Maggie The Cat** will return in her own monthly series from Image Comics. The book will be written and drawn by Mike Grell.

Maggie The Cat was first introduced to the public in **Jon Sable Freelance** #11 (April, 1983). "In many ways, Maggie was the first so-called 'bad-girl' of heroines," said Grell. "With all the interest in female heroes her time has finally come."

Capital Owner Goes After Acclaim

Capital City co-owner Milton Griepp launched a scalding verbal attack against Acclaim Comics in a recent column appearing in **Internal Correspondence**, Capital's magazine for retailers. Though the column focused on the purported decline of superhero comics, Griepp was most decisive when it came to Acclaim, "According to most retailer reports, Acclaim sales are dropping to near-invisible levels, with little interest from consumers. One wonders how long the management of the parent will tolerate the publishing losses in its comic division — or if they will pull the plug on this relic of the comics boom."

Baywatch — The Magazine (Sort Of)

And now for something completely different. Actual photos of the Baywatch actors are used to create this comic book. It will be a photo-based comic book with little to no art. This is pretty different and it just might fly. The price ($4.95) and the confusing title (it's a comic, not a mag) should keep numbers low. For the long term, this is the sort of thing collectors will likely be looking for twenty years down the road. This is one of those few new books that could actually qualify as a legitimate potential investment. Someday, today's Baywatch fans will be old and nostalgic, and a photo comic will be as good a way as any to recapture it all.

Vantage Re-Launches

Next month **Vantage Comic & Card Picks** re-launches with a new first issue. **Vantage** designer Mike Munshaw promises some exciting new design changes. **Vantage** will continue on with a new first issue, second issue, and so forth. "We wanted to make some noise in **Previews** and **Advance Comics** this month since we are listed in different places in each of those catalogs and retailers are changing their ordering patterns this Winter," said Vantage Publisher Rob Golub.

In **Advance Comics**, **Vantage Comic & Card Picks** is listed in the magazine sub-section of the comics section. In **Previews**, **Vantage Comic & Card Picks** is simply listed in the comics section.

Musicland Pushes DC Versus Marvel

DC and Marvel have designated Musicland their "primary mass market partner," according to DC Comics.

With over 1,450 outlets, the Musicland group is made up of Sam Goody, Media Play, On Cue, Suncoast, and (you guessed it) Musicland stores nationwide. All of these outlets are now giving out free **DC Versus Marvel** preview comic books which contain voting ballots. The previews encourage fans to visit their local comic shops.

According to DC, "This is without a doubt the biggest comics promotion ever, designed to get customers into comic book specialty stores." **Vantage** still expects **DC Versus Marvel** to do well.

Show dealers may want to grab a few previews for their Winter shows. Throw 'em in your three-for-a-dollar box later this Winter for a few extra bucks.

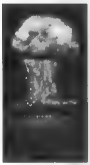
GI Joe Movie and Comic

With a cover by Frank Miller, Dark Horse's **GI Joe** #1 reintroduces comic fans to the ol' Joe. This Fall, GI Joe gets a new television re-launch. If the series does well, look for the new title and Marvel's old GI Joe title to do nicely.

DC Versus Marvel Spills Into Silver Books

Some dealers are reporting slight increases in demand for silver age comics that feature battles between great Marvel and DC heroes. This could be a new trend in response to the growing excitement over the coming **DC Versus Marvel** miniseries. **Fantastic Four** #25-26 (Hulk versus Thing) and **Superman** #199 (Flash and Superman's first race) are among the books that have been gaining more attention. Dealers should have no problem making books like these move over the next few months.

Futuretech #1 / Swarm #1



Small publisher Mushroom Comics continues to put out the very impressive **Arachnis** from the talented Ortiz brothers. Also due out from the company a few months down the road is **Futuretech #1 / Swarm #1**. This flip book introduces two new series from the company. The computer coloring is, of course, excellent, and the few art pages we've seen so far are quite nice.

artwork to swarm

Generation X To Be TV Movie

Generation X, the Fox live-action TV movie, has started production in Vancouver, Canada for broadcast later this season on "The Fox Tuesday Night Movie." The two-hour drama will feature characters from Marvel's Generation X comic book

Generation X™ & © 1996 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

Characters portrayed are to include Jubilee, Skin, the White Queen, Banshee, Mondo, Buff, Refrax, M, and Russel Tresh. The movie will also feature the Xavier Institute. All of this will be live-action, not cartoon!

This movie seems to fit in with Fox's current stratagy of producing shows and movies that have the same off-beat, mysterious flavor as the X-Files (e.g., Nowhere Man, The Invaders). A single TV movie can make a difference — dealers may wish to make sure they have a little Generation X back-stock.

O'Barr Counsels Creators

James O'Barr is allowing other creators to produce a new miniseries, but he remains adamant about the cat. "This new series will let other creators tell their own story using the Crow mythos. The only rule is that the crow has to bring back a soul to avenge a wrong," he continued, adding cryptically, "And there has to be a cat."

For more on the new Crow minis and their amazing back-issue potential, see the article in the main section of this issue.

New Mag To Be Like An X-Men Yearbook!

In March, Vantage launches its third hard copy magazine, **Comics Focus,** the new magazine that spotlights one area of comics in each issue. **Comics Focus #0 — X-Men** is the first issue. It spotlights Marvel's X-Men.

Hard-hitting interviews with X-Men gods *Mark Waid and Chris Claremont* will thrust fans into the strange future and the jaded past of the X-Men! Although **Comics Focus #0 — X-Men** will feature in-depth *general comics news, its emphasis will be on Marvel's X-Men.*

X-Men art will be featured on the cover and a large X-Men logo will also be featured underneath the Comics Focus logo on the cover. "It will be almost like an X-Men yearbook," said Publisher Rob Golub, "I want to make something that any self-respecting X-Men fan will *have to have.* But at the same time it will be an objective newsmagazine, not just a hype-mag."

Features are to include a fan-written essay on dangling plot threads, an article on how some X-characters were invented, and a very special *storyline update* that attempts to answer the ultimate X-question . . . just what the heck is going on in today's X-Men comics?

Comics Focus Makes Internet History!

As if spotlighting the X-Men was not enough, a unique Internet promotion has been designed to build advance orders for distributors and retailers! *For the first time ever, fans and retailers are given an Internet address in a solicitation which they can use to affect the nature of what they are ordering!* This new back-end marketing technique is sure to build sales among the growing number of comics fans who are also Internet fans!

That is, **Comics Focus #0 — X-Men** readers will be able to peruse the results of a giant X-Men contest where fans will have chosen their ten most favorite X-characters! To cast a vote, retailers and fans are being told in solicitations and advertising to visit Vantage on the Internet by March 1, 1996 at http://www.insv.com/vantage At this Internet address, retailers and fans will vote on their favorite X-Men characters! Fans who do not have Internet access will also be able to vote in upcoming issues of **Vantage Comic & Card Picks.**

COMICS FOCUS

NON-SPORTS PICKS

Artwork™ & © 1995 FPG

Batman Artwork™ & © 1996 DC Comics

There's A Storm A'Brewin'

When all-chromium card sets began appearing regularly, fans became somewhat jaded and lost some of their interest in non-chromium card sets. Then they got used to the all-chromium sets and started resenting the high prices charged for cards where the chromium was simply slabbed over the cards. FPG is presenting their first all-metal set, but it is likely to stand out because of the process being used for the cards.

The first few FPG sets had old-time flat holograms as chase cards, but then they caught a good idea and started putting in Metallic Storm cards instead. These cards used metal, but only judiciously — they highlighted parts of the artwork instead of overwhelming the picture. Ironically this style of card had already been successful for SkyBox (the Spectra-Etch chase cards in Doomsday stand out), but FPG has had several card sets a month to practice on, and they've gotten quite good at it. This leads to their newest set — all the cards will be Metallic Storm cards. The artwork features ten of the normal FPG suspects (Chris Achilleos, Ken Kelly, Brom, Rowena, and others), and it is likely that opening a pack will actually slow collectors down as they look at each individual card to see how the card has been designed.

The use of multiple artists in a set has met with some resistance in the Colossal Card sets (fans would collect only a few of the artists rather than the entire set, a result that was not lost on FPG — they started doing single artist sets instead), but this all-metal card set might have a wider appeal.

The chase cards are golden embossed Metallic Storm cards, which should completely stand out in a crowd, but there is no mention of autograph cards for this set (something that has always been popular in the art card sets).

Vantage expects that the production run on these cards (the same size as done for Steranko and Devito and others, 1995 cases) will prove inadequate for the demand, and these cards could prove tough to find after a few weeks. The cards are pricey, about $10-$20 more than the typical Comic Images all-chromium sets, but art fans have

Vantage Card Picks

Masters of Fantasy
Metallic Foil
Boris & Bell All Chromium
Batman Master Series

shown themselves to be willing to pay more if they get more.

Two Of A Kind

The artwork done by Julie Bell and Boris Vallejo is similar, but each brings a slightly different style that is easily recognized by their fans. They have frequently done work on the same card sets, but this time Comic Images has teamed them up to produce an all-chromium set that is all theirs. Unlike most sets that feature more than one artist, there will be few complaints from fans that they only like part of the set since most fans either adore both of the artists or neither of them. (**Vantage** has no explanation for people who don't like their art style!)

The 90-card set is enhanced by six normal chase cards, but a seventh will be attached to the outside of the box (Comic Images has done this before, but usually with a promo card for another set). The rare three-card subset is mercifully a chromium one instead of normal cards, and this set gives fans a chance at two different autographed cards — one from each of the artists.

P.S. — Don't forget to pick up a binder early on if you want one — the Comic Images binders with the limited six-card press sheet usually are sold out and gone within a month, and there are few second chances.

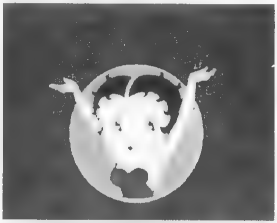
It's A Card Set – No, It's A Comic Story

The SkyBox Master series has had an uneven history (highs include the Marvel Masterpiece Series One, and lows feature the D.O.A. Star Trek Master Series Two), and we are about to be greeted with another set that can go either way. The promos of the Batman Master Series cards that Vantage has seen are truly impressive, using thick 20-point, painted cards to tell a story that we are anxious to read: it appears that the Joker has killed Batman, but the Joker claims he didn't do it! Nightwing, Robin, and the Joker search for the truth through the card set, following a story that was written for us by Doug Moench. Before groaning with with memories of Plasm and Dark Dominion, take a closer look — the pictures on the fronts of the cards are simply well-done artwork, not comic book panels, and the story is related on the backs of the cards.

Aside from the illusive final cards of the story, fans will be looking for a parallel set and four different levels of chase cards (what else can we expect from SkyBox these days?) The parallel set is on 24-point stock rather than 20, and is foil-enhanced somehow. The chase sets include: six Spectra-Etch cards (one in every six packs), ten master villains (the heartbreak set occurring only once

Batman Artwork™ & © 1996 DC Comics

in 15 packs, these should be the most expensive), and two Batman Chromium and two Batman Clearchrome cards (one in 18 packs). Overall, a fun product for the Dark Knight.



Toon Time

Did you enjoy the first Betty Boop cards from Krome Products? If so, stick around for the Betty Boop Pinups card set. This time the entire set is chromium, featuring 90 regular cards and one six-card subset. The unusual twist is the second, rarer subset — three black-and-white chase cards that claim to feature the latest in chromium technology! Vantage suggests you try to pick up these three cards before the price guides come out.

There is a second set from Krome this month — the Garfield trading cards. Fans of this slightly (okay, very) pudgy cat outnumber fans of anything else solicited this month, and dealers may be surprised at the casual pack sales they generate. In addition to the 90 cards in the regular set and the nine chromium chase cards, there are two puzzle sets (consisting of two cards each), which feature fans will be after. With eight cards per pack, dealers will be able to bust boxes down and sell sets for a change, so chase cards will be mercifully plentiful (the lower price for the non-chromium cards should help as well).

Stretching the Force

Lets see, we've had those card sets in the seventies, three galaxy sets, three metal sets, but only two Widevision sets — must be time for Topps to bring out the Return of the Jedi Widevision cards. Like the two Widevision sets that preceded it, this set features full-screen images from a Star Wars movie and ten chase cards. In addition, there will be six Movie Poster cards, and one box in ten will have a 3-D chase card.

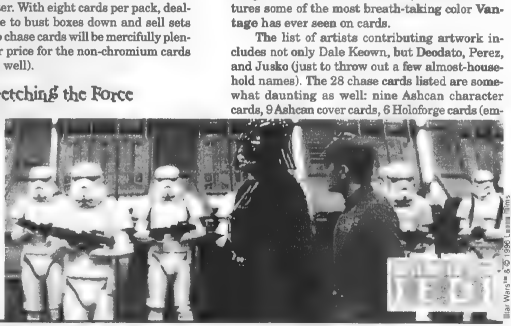
if you want to save something, squirrel away a few extra sets of the chases (especially the 3-D card!)

Dealers under-ordered the first wide-vision cards, but compensated nicely on the second box. Vantage expects sufficient boxes to float around for a long time on this release, but as with the previous two releases there won't be nearly enough chase cards to go around — if you want to save something, squirrel away a few extra sets of the chases (especially the 3-D card!).

Speculative Corner

What's big and nasty and no longer at Image? Pitt, of course. Not only is the comic debuting from a different publisher this month, but a card set is arriving from Intrepid Marketing. The number of issues of Pitt that have shipped has been very, very small, which has no doubt limited the growth of fans for the comics, but this set features some of the most breath-taking color Vantage has ever seen on cards.

The list of artists contributing artwork includes not only Dale Keown, but Deodato, Perez, and Jusko (just to throw out a few almost-household names). The 28 chase cards listed are somewhat daunting as well: nine Ashcan character cards, 9 Ashcan cover cards, 6 Holoforge cards (em-



Star Wars™ & © 1995 Lucasfilm Ltd.

PM™ & © 1992 Classic Images

cards, 9 Ashcan cover cards, 6 Holoforge cards (embossed holograms), 3 Siliconite double-sided foil-highlighted cards, and 1 Megamation lenticular card (one per 10 boxes). Not enough? Every third box will contain a poster of all the 100 regular cards.

These boxes will ship with 48 packs, and retail for about $2 a pack (or less). Could they be a hit? Of course! Will they be? Um, ask us next Summer...

Quick Notes

FPG is also releasing a normal card set this month, the Tom Canty Fantasy art cards. Canty is perhaps best-known for his work on the covers for the Eternal Champion books by Michael Morcock. The normal FPG features are all in place (90-card set, five metallic chase cards, and 1000 autographed cards).

Comic Images is keeping up with the release of the William Stout Saurians and Sorcerers cards (apparently dinosaurs alone aren't enough anymore). The set is 90 cards, but fans will also be after 6 Masters of the Universe chase cards and the autographed cards (there will also be a chase card attached to the box, a feature that CI is apparently planning to use for a lot of its releases). Extra interest may be focused on the three card subset: they are Crypt Keeper cards.

Extra interest may be focused on the three card subset: they are Crypt Keeper cards.

COMICS ARE FOR READING First!

By Rich Keller

Well, another year has passed us by. We've all grown a little older (for some of my friends change little to a lot), a little wiser, and probably poorer since those comic books cost so much. And as I jump into 1996 head first I also end this column.

Sort of.

Y'see, faithful **Vantage** readers, the times are a'changin (A nod to B.D. for that insight). Comic companies are combining, distributors are closing, heroes and the worlds they preside over are facing major changes. Comics aren't just on the shelves anymore, they're on your TV, in the movies, in hard cover novels. They've even entered the Internet and World Wide Web (Shameless plug for **Starship Online**, available soon everywhere).

That leaves me in a bit of a bind. The title "Comics Are For Reading First" just doesn't cut it anymore. So, where does this major revelation leave you, the **Vantage** buyer? Will you feel something is missing from the comprehensive, detailed reporting that you see here every month? Will you sit there in your darkened room, alone, rocking back and forth at the foot of your bed, clutching this very magazine and crying my name out in heavy sobs?

A man can dream, can't he?

Well fear not! Rob Golub, the kind, warm-hearted man who will also be publishing **Starship Online** in the new year (Shameless Plug #2) has allowed me to redefine my column to fit the changing industry. What will it be called? What will it feature? You think I'm telling you right now? I want you to sweat it out until next issue. Then more of you will buy the magazine.

And now for something totally different . . .the yearly thanks. The first person I'd like to thank would be my publisher, editor and all around nice guy, Rob Golub, for keeping me on and inviting me to write for his new magazine, **Starship Online** (Rob, you owe me for this BIG TIME). Had I never responded to his e-mail request for writers I would not be where I am today. Thanks also to Steve Asvitt who has corrected all my grammar, punctuation, and sentence mistakes for the last two years and probably sits there every month and says "What the hell is this guy talking about?". Thanks also to graphic designer Mike Munshaw, who'll be overseeing the design of my new column over here and in Starship Online (OK! No more! Just buy the friggin' magazine willya!)

Of course thanks to all of the comic store owners and conventioneers who guided me into the right direction for quality comics. Finally, thanks and big wet kisses to all of those companies who sent me stuff to review and treasure in my own collection, including: Regrografix, Lost Cause Productions, Antartic Press, Marlowe & Company, One Shot Press, Orphan Underground and many, many more. I wish you all much success and fortune in the coming years.

Did I forget anyone? Oh yea. Thank you, **Vantage** readers. Without you I'd be alone in my darkened room, rocking at the foot of my bed . . . Well, you get the idea. I wish you all a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and a very joyful New Year.

See ya all on the other side.

I know I reviewed this comic not too long ago. However, this is more of a dedication than a review. After fifteen years and nearly 250 issues behind its belt the New Titans is being discontinued. Now don't go into mourning just yet because it will be relaunched in 1996. Unfortunately the man who co-created the book, the man who saw these New Teen Titans through their mid-twenties, will not be joining them. That man is Marv Wolfman. Mr. Wolfman has decided to take a rest and concentrate on some new projects. Well, he deserves every minute of it.

Other than a few issues here and there Marv has been there since day one, when he and co-plotter George Perez decided to revamp the original Titans, adding members like Starfire and Cyborg. He's been there during Brother Blood, Crisis, Titans Chaos, Team Titans, and Zero Hour. He's been there when Robin became Nightwing,

'marv wolfman stayed on through good times and bad. if the book started slowing down he would find some way to jumpstart it'

Kid Flash, Flash. He made Wonder Girl into Troia and then into a Darkstar. He was onband when Speedy became Arsenal (and eventual leader of the Titans) and Aqualad transformed into Aqualad... Well I didn't say he was perfect did I?

Now some of you **Vantage** readers may be going 'So What? Everyone does that these days.' Um, no not really. In the world of comics today writers and artists are more prone to short terms on comics that have long standing heroes. Very short. Very, very short. Some talents are hired just for the first story arcs and then move on to the next project (And what the heck are these story arcs anyway? Whatever happened to a two part story or even a single shot?). Then the reader has to adjust to a new team when they were just getting used to the old one.

Marv Wolfman stayed on through good times and bad. If the book started slowing down he would find some way to jumpstart it. If a character was getting too old to be a Girl or a Kid he would introduce them as a new hero, someone more contemporary. Sure, he made some mistakes on the way (Danny Chase, for example), but he never gave up. He even improved his track record by expanding the Titans universe in the 90's with the Team Titans (now defunct) and Deathstroke the Terminator. Not to say that his track record was damaged in any way. He took a group of heroes who had been around for fifteen years, reinvented them, and kept them around for another fifteen. That's impressive considering that some heroes who are reintroduced these days have very short book runs.

How did he do this you ask (Man, you ask alot of questions). He made the heroes he wrote about as real as possible. They may have had superpowers, but they could have bad days like the rest of us. These heroes were coming of age and he wrote about their loves, their disappointments, their rage. He wrote about a boy wonder who was tired of living under the shadow of his mentor, a flashy kid who was dying from his very own speed, a wonderful girl who was trying to find her adopted parents. Everything that goes on in one form or another in the world today.

So, where does that leave the Titans for the future. Who knows. Rumors abound, some even saying that Dan 'I am Comic Books' Jurgens will be taking over the book. Others say that they'll begin to hang out at a coffee shop called Central Perk and make jokes for 30 minutes every Thursday (It'll be right after 'Friends'. It'll be called 'SuperFriends'. Get it?). OK, I made that last one up, but wouldn't that be cool. I hope whoever takes it over remembers the history that has been built by Marv Wolfman and honors it, rather than scrapping it all and starting it over from scratch.

Good Luck, Marv. We'll miss ya.

NO, PAL -- ONLY THE TITANS. BUT I THINK WE'LL DO JUST FINE.
THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE THEY'RE GOING TO STOP
THEN GET READY... EXCEPT--
--I THINK I RECOGNIZE TWO OF THEM

Teen Titans™ & © 1996 DC Comics

Taking It PERSONALLY

By Len Strazewski

A Hollywood screenwriter told a funny and frightening story at a recent writing seminar I attended at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill. A comedy specialist, he had been invited to pitch a screenplay concept at a major studio and was given all of the criteria the studio wanted met.

The studio was targeting a teen-age audience and a summer release — one of those heartwarming, rollicking comedies that could lead to a sequel and threequel is successful. The concept: teen-age geniuses at summer camp.

"This was right up my alley," the screenwriter said. "And I prepared a pitch that was probably the best proposal I had ever done. I had this idea down cold and was ready to field just about any question. I worked in some great jokes, a love interest—everything you need for a good comedy."

Pitch day came and the studio executives—the "suits" as he called them—listened intently, nodding and smiling throughout. When he was finished, one executive led off the questioning with a stunner.

"I really like the idea, but I'm a little worried about limiting the audience. Do they have to be geniuses. We wouldn't want to alienate the average students," the suit said.

The screenwriter started backpedaling. "Well, I suppose they could be B students—maybe one or two are geniuses," he said.

Another suit added another tough question. "I don't know that we want to link ourselves too much to a specific time of the year—does this have to take place at summer camp?"

By this time, the screenwriter realized the concept was blown and the executives simply had changed their minds since they contacted him—something that happens all the time in Hollywood.

"Studios invest so much in films that they are ultra-cautious. No one ever lost his job by saying 'no' to a project, so they were just looking for a way to get me out of there," the screenwriter said. "The job never happened."

I wish I could say that the comics business is immune from all of that confusion, but it isn't and the situation is just getting worse as comics sales continue to drop. A few weeks ago, one of the big comic companies asked me to pitch a mini-series featuring a super-hero character I created a couple of years ago. Developed before the creator-owned boom, the character is now owned by the publisher.

I wish I could say that the comics business is immune from all of that confusion

This character, which I will call "Pretty Fast Lass" recently appeared in another of the company's titles, one of the few titles that has actually been increasing sales. PFL fit in pretty well with the other title's main character, Speed Stud.

The editor in charge, a young, bright and enthusiastic assistant editor, had lots of ideas for the mini-series and they were actually quite good. The series would follow PFL in a period of emotional upheaval and guest star a character from Speed Stud, though not the main character. The series would be designed to appeal to SS audience who already knew and liked the character. She also recommended I create a new villain.

The first proposal—about 10 double-spaced pages—was a straight-ahead super-hero proposal. PFL has powers on the blink—probably due to survivor guilt from a traumatic family experience. She finds a new way to boost her powers, but it takes a toll on her health and personality. The villain, an Asian business executive, has been jealous of PFL since they were kids and now wants to take advantage of her weakness. Meanwhile, he also wants to develop his own super-speed through the use of an herbal mixture that he is also marketing to Gen X parties. It is addictive. Oh yeah, he murdered his father to get control of his company.

First reaction—the villain was evil enough and had a silly name (Rudolph). Points well taken. For the second draft, I came up with a new and more evil name for the villain, added a super-powered girlfriend with which he shared a submissive/dominant relationship and a scene in which PFL vibrates a house to powder when her powers go out of control.

Better, but still not evil enough, so in the third draft (14 pages double-spaced), I the created a tougher incarnation of the villain as a guy who has forced metabolic changes on himself and now looks like a wild boar. His girlfriend has some sort of astrological/magical hold on him, even though he is the dominant guy. PFL gets a new name, goes crazy and has a heart attack from out of control powers. By the end of the story, the villain is floating in a burn tank because he cooked all of the skin off of his body trying to compete with PFL.

This draft made it up to the bosses and their response was puzzling. The series was targeted TOO MUCH to the Speed Stud audience—couldn't it be written for a broader super-hero audience? By this time, however, Speed Stud was close to being the company's best selling title—an indication that the company didn't have much broader an audience. Also, the villain wasn't evil enough and we could use the new name for PFL because another company title had a group of characters not yet introduced that might have a similar but not the same name.

Most of the proposal had been trashed, though the editor wanted to try again. The editor had an idea for a villain—based on a villain from editor's favorite horror novel. The editor had a name, too, that sounded like a good comic book name though it did not really relate to the new villain's powers.

I figured it was a time for a really evil villain, so I turned the next version into a "comic noir" with PFL uncovering a dark scandal from decades before, involving erotic photographs of a female character from the earlier period, an "unbeatable" villain who is murdering attractive women just to deliver his scandalous message, and guest appearances by some classic super-hero characters who may have been caught in the scandal.

This proposal ended the discussion. The editor called a few days later to say that the project "just wasn't coming together," and "it wasn't really what the top editors were looking for."

I asked the editor to tell me what the top guns WERE looking for, since the concept had changed a few times in mid-stream. The editor couldn't answer.

"I don't really know, but they are being very cautious now. Most proposals aren't being approved," the editor said.

I can understand. The stuff they approved last year is stiffing big time—taking down a huge portion of the comic book audience. With the present track record of these editors, I'd be worried, too.

How about a comic book about genius super-hero teen-agers at summer camp?

they are being very cautious now. most proposals aren't being approved.

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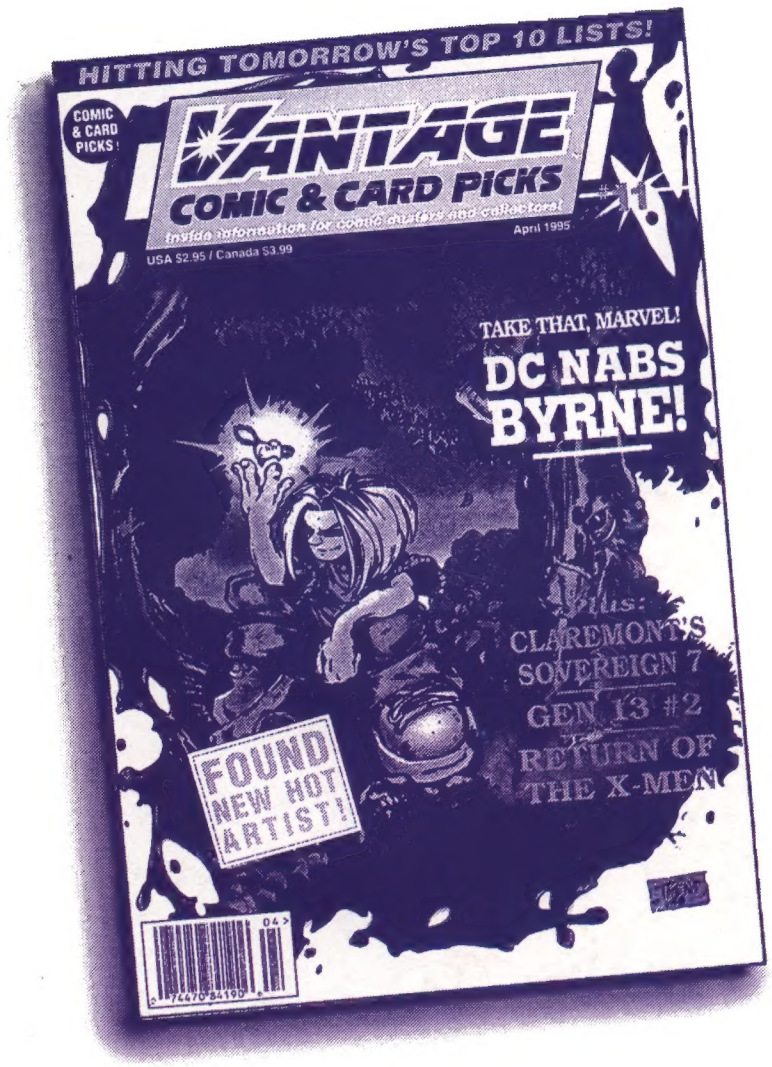

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